

Date and Time: Friday, May 12, 2023 1:22:00PM PDT

Job Number: 197010272

Document (1)

1. [*Keeping poor people in the dark*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "doom" and ("climate" or "eco")

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Sources: National Post (f/k/a The Financial Post)(Canada);
All Content Types: News; Timeline: Jan 01, 2018 to May 11,
2023; Geography by Document: North America; Geography
by Document: Canada

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National Post (f/k/a The Financial Post) (Canada)

March 27, 2019 Wednesday

National Edition

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Section: FP COMMENT; Pg. FP9

Length: 842 words

Byline: Joe Oliver, Financial Post

Body

I recently returned from a Petroleum and Energy Summit in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG), which put into stark relief the moral imperative of developing fossil fuels, especially for the poorest people in developing countries. By implication, it reinforced the profoundly unethical stand of climate-change alarmists who are working to rid the world of hydrocarbons, irrespective of the harm to economic growth, employment and a decent standard of living for billions of people.

A mere 13 per cent of Papua New Guineans have access to electricity. The government's goal is to extend electrification to 70 per cent by 2030, an ambitious precondition to substantially raising GDP per capita above its current \$2,400.

PNG is far behind in electricity usage among larger Asia-Pacific countries. There is a strong correlation between GDP and energy consumption, which requires affordable power sources. Energy mix varies considerably in the region and has been critical to growth. For example, coal supplies 64 per cent of energy in Australia and 55 per cent in Indonesia, while gas represents 63 per cent in Thailand.

PNG imports heavy fuel oil and diesel for 40 per cent of its energy, but does not access its abundant coal reserves. Yet coal is an important source of inexpensive energy in south-east Asia. Over 2,500 coal plants, with total generating power of around 2,000,000 megawatts (mw), are operating or in development in Asian signatory countries of the Paris Accord. For context, Canada's 100 largest generating stations have a combined capacity of 100,829 mw.

PNG is now debating development of its coal resources. It will take into account safety and economic advantages for its citizens. It should not consider global climate consequences because they will be infinitesimal.

Over a billion people lack access to electricity and another billion and a quarter have insecure access. It is impossible to elevate people in dire need to a decent standard of living without very inexpensive electricity. Depriving them of the opportunity to escape grinding poverty would be inexcusable, without an existential justification.

Alarmists claim to have that justification. However, failed predictions about temperature change, disappearing polar bears, ice melting, islands sinking into the sea and extreme weather events have seriously undermined their scare tactics and moral preening. The evidence simply does not substantiate the apocalyptic prophesies. Nobel prize winner and theoretical physicist Richard Feynman commented that "It doesn't matter how beautiful your theory is, it doesn't matter how smart you are. If it doesn't agree with experiment, it's wrong." He could have added, it doesn't matter how many people agree with you.

Keeping poor people in the dark

The **climate** is always changing.

Doubling Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions increases the temperature by 1.1 degree Celsius and secondary effects have not multiplied that number. Increased GHG makes plants more drought resistant and increases arable land. Human beings contribute to raising emissions, but it is unclear how much warming is anthropogenic. Extreme weather events have not increased, according to the IPCC. There is no satisfactory explanation for why temperatures have risen, fallen and remained flat during the last century of steadily increasing emissions. Since our grasp of climatology is obviously imperfect, we cannot claim that the science is settled.

These comments may set alarmists' hair on fire, because religious-like conviction does not tolerate conflicting evidence. Unrealized forecasts should induce modesty rather than intensify certainty.

We should responsibly develop the resources we have been blessed with because we owe it to our countrymen in the here and now. Also, economic growth can finance science and adaptation, which offer the best opportunity for breakthroughs in innovative technology and environmental protection.

These issues are particularly stark for developing countries. They are also significant for wealthy countries like Canada. If 3,000 SNC Lavalin jobs are worth protecting in Quebec, what about over 150,000 jobs in Alberta's energy sector? It is disgraceful to abandon the immense benefits that can flow to all Canadians, including First Nations, from exporting our oil and gas to overseas markets.

In spite of the drumbeats of imminent **doom**, farm output continues to rise across the world. Hundreds of millions of people have escaped from dire poverty in China and India, thanks to fossil fuels. Life expectancy is rising, health outcomes are improving, education is increasing. Progress is undeniable and affordable energy is a key contributor.

Climate alarmists have long claimed the high moral ground. In fact, they stand in the way of progress and prosperity. They should be ashamed of how they have misrepresented science to advance a flawed agenda and even more for causing harm to the world's most vulnerable people.

Joe Oliver is the former minister of natural resources and minister of finance. !@COPYRIGHT=© 2019 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Graphic

Peter Parks, Afp, Getty Images Files; Residents in the village of Hanuabada, one of only two remaining stilt villages in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, where just 13 per cent of the country's population has access to electricity, Joe Oliver writes.;

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: Opinion

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (90%); GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (90%); POOR POPULATION (90%); POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS (90%); GREENHOUSE GASES (89%); LIVING STANDARDS (89%); TALKS &

Keeping poor people in the dark

MEETINGS (89%); EMISSIONS (78%); ETHICS (78%); **CLIMATE** CHANGE (77%); ECONOMIC CONDITIONS (77%); IMPORT TRADE (77%); LIFE FORMS (77%); MARINE MAMMALS (77%); CONSUMPTION (76%); ECONOMIC GROWTH (76%); EMERGING MARKETS (76%); NOBEL PRIZES (76%); NEGATIVE NEWS (73%); SEVERE WEATHER (72%); WEATHER (72%); AGRICULTURAL LANDS (71%); EMPLOYMENT GROWTH (71%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (71%); SEVERE WINTER WEATHER (66%); TREATIES & AGREEMENTS (64%); AWARDS & PRIZES (60%); PHYSICS (60%); recently,returned,petroleum,energy,summit,moresby (%)

Industry: ENERGY & UTILITIES (92%); COAL INDUSTRY (90%); FOSSIL FUELS (90%); PETROLEUM PRODUCTS (90%); FOSSIL FUEL POWER PLANTS (89%); ELECTRIC POWER PLANTS (78%); EMISSIONS (78%); ENERGY CONSUMPTION (78%); OIL & GAS CONSUMPTION (78%); COAL FIRED PLANTS (77%); DIESEL FUEL (73%); AGRICULTURAL LANDS (71%)

Geographic: PORT MORESBY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA (79%); PAPUA NEW GUINEA (93%); ASIA (92%); CANADA (92%); AUSTRALIA (79%); INDONESIA (79%); SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA (79%); THAILAND (79%)

Load-Date: March 27, 2019

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